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Paul Green's "Louisiana Cavalier"

David Birge

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

Paul Green's *Louisiana Cavalier*

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by
David Birge
Omaha, Nebraska

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

INTRODUCTION

In 1936 a new genre of theatre, symphonic drama, was established with the opening of Paul Green's The Lost Colony. Green was able to create this genre by combining certain elements of the plays from historical eras and placing them in a contemporary setting. Like the religious plays of the Middle Ages and the passion plays of then and now, the local community was to be involved in almost every level of production; like the pageant or the masque, singing, dancing, and scenic spectacle were to be integral to its production; like the Greek theatre the play was to be produced outdoors on a specially designed stage; and like many Greek dramas, The Lost Colony was to be based on local history and to stress pride in the community. Since 1936 dozens of other outdoor dramas by Paul Green and others have appeared in many places in America and, like The Lost Colony, they annually draw capacity crowds.

I was fortunate to appear in Louisiana Cavalier, the only outdoor drama written by Green to open in the bicentennial year, 1976. Until that time most of what I had heard about the professional quality of outdoor drama had been unflattering ridicule. So I did not expect to gain much from the experience, beyond professional credit and pay. After the season began, however, my attitude toward outdoor dramas changed. Despite the dull, unwieldy script, the lack of excellent actors,

constant money problems, and an amateur administrative staff, something important happened during the season. A large cross section of people saw the play; many were moved, excited, and interested in seeing other plays indoor or out. This drama built an audience for other drama. It seemed to me that if outdoor drama had such appeal, it should be developed rather than ridiculed.

This paper traces the development of one such drama, Louisiana Cavalier. Each of the four parts of the paper examines one aspect of the total creation. The first part deals with Green's life and work and the influences which led him to write outdoor drama. The second part examines the text and Green's use of the special elements. The third part chronicles the production from the rehearsals to closing night. The final part is a compendium of facts, changes made by the company between the first and second seasons, suggestions to performers of outdoor drama, and personal reflections on the season.

Many communities like Natchitoches, Louisiana, site of Louisiana Cavalier, have outdoor dramas, but much colorful local history still remains undramatized. I hope that the telling of the story behind the production of Louisiana Cavalier will inspire or at least interest other communities to pursue outdoor dramas of their own so that citizens of each town will feel closer to and take pride in their historic roots.

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Part I: Paul Green, Playwright (1894-)

LIFE

Paul Green was born on March 17, 1894, at his father's farm near Lillington, North Carolina, a town about thirty miles southwest of Raleigh. He spent his first twenty-two years close to home dividing his time almost evenly between work on his father's farm and school. Working alongside Negroes and sharecroppers on the farm, he developed an understanding of their plights; he understood their distrust of landowners and became sympathetic to their needs and aspirations. When not working on the farm, he read voraciously and attended a country school. Intellectually he soon outgrew the country school, so he enrolled in the nearby Buie's Creek Academy and upon graduation in 1913, he prepared for college. He spent the next two years (1913-15) teaching and serving as principal of the country school, and playing professional baseball in Lillington. The money he earned from these two jobs enabled him to enroll in the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill in 1916.

Responding to the WWI recruiting posters, Green enlisted in the Army in 1917, after only one year in college. He rose from private to second lieutenant, seeing action in Belgium and France. For reasons which he has never disclosed, his

experiences in WWI gave him strong anti-war sentiments; these sentiments can be seen in many of his plays including Louisiana Cavalier. While serving in France with the Corps of Engineers, Green learned mapmaking and drafting. These skills would prove valuable later when he helped design the first amphitheatres for his outdoor plays.

Green returned to UNC in 1918 and became interested in philosophy and theatre due to the influence of professors Horace Williams and Frederich Koch. Williams introduced Green to Hegelian philosophy and convinced him to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy. Green finished this degree in 1922, earned a Master's degree in philosophy from Cornell, and returned to UNC to teach philosophy.

"Proff" Koch was recruited from the University of North Dakota by the president of UNC to develop a North Carolina folk drama program. Koch had been very successful in developing a North Dakota program and was eager to do the same in North Carolina. He founded the Carolina Playmakers and was overseer for the construction of the Playmaker's Playhouse. Then he convinced Green, Elizabeth Lay (later Mrs. Paul Green), Hubert Heffner, Thomas Wolfe, and other students to search for materials and write plays based on Carolina folk and their tales.

Paul Green became one of the Playmaker's most prolific and proficient contributors. Carl Carmer, writing in a 1932 issue of Theatre Arts Monthly magazine, explained where Green

found the information and images which reflect so realistically the people of North Carolina.

> For years he had worked with hard-bitten, lank toilers--the stern economy of their lives in ironic contrast with the lush extravagance of the soil that is always choking their crops with malignant encroachments from the swamp. He had sung their ballads with them, songs that had been on the lips of their fathers' fathers and had the roots of their melancholy stories far back in pre-Elizabethean England. And he had seen them cling with masochistic fervor to the letter of a cruel Calvinistic creed that forced a further austerity upon their already barren lives. He knew as well the tragedy of the aristocratic land-owner, a man of family, isolated in the Big House, closing his eyes to the fact that a changing social order and his own inbred weakness had pronounced his doom. Lastly, and most affectionately he knew the Negroes. Chopping cotton down the long rows with Lazy Lawrence dancing on ahead was no imagined experience to Paul Green. He knew why black laughter came from cabins at the end of a back-breaking day in the fields. He understood the emotional release afforded by an assimilated religion which the descendents of African tribesmen had bent to their needs much more successfully than had their white neighbors. The comedy of shiftlessness and the wayward fancy, the comedy of a human earthy attitude toward sex, the melodrama of a quick temper, were made a part of him by a series of memories of the black people he knew. So were the tragedies of the Negro girl and her white lover, of the restless despair in the veins of the mulatto, of the persecution undertaken in the name of white supremacy.[1]

With such understanding of and sensitivity to the vast diversity of the people in his home environment, Green had voluminous material for many plays.

In the late twenties and thirties, Green did a lot of traveling outside of North Carolina. He went to Broadway for

[1]Carl Carmer, "Paul Green, the Making of an American Dramatist," Theatre Arts Monthly 16 (December 1932): 996-7.

the openings of his plays In Abraham's Bosom (1927) and The Field God (1928). Their successes prompted his friend, Barrett Clark, to urge Green to seek a Guggenheim fellowship for studying European theatres. Green applied and won a grant. He visited Germany where he met Kurt Weill and saw the Berliner Ensemble; and he visited England where he met Bernard Shaw; but he remained unimpressed with the European theatre until he saw the visiting Moscow Jewish Theatre's production of The Dybbuk. The integration of music and drama in the production excited him. His conversation with the director, Alexis Granowski, proved to be one of the most important events in Green's career. Green recounts in his book Drama and the Weather an important impression made by Granowski during the conversation.

> Your nation has everything to make a great theatre movement possible. You are the richest of all countries in dramatic material. . . But I prophesy that before the real genius of your country can be expressed, can find its statement on the stage, music vitally integrated into the drama itself must be used. For instance, why hasn't America ever created a great Negro theatre?. . . Think of the vivid folk speech, folklore, and tall tales, the dramatic conditions surrounding that submerged and yet marvelously gifted people.[2]

This was a call to action and Green was determined to answer it. He has spent the rest of his life developing the American musical drama.

Upon returning to America, Green spent a few years in Hollywood as a scriptwriter for Warner Brothers. He left in a

[2]Quoted by Paul Green, "Symphonic Outdoor Drama," Drama and the Weather, New York: Samuel French, Inc. 1958, pp. 19-21.

huff after he was told that his plays, as written, were not salable. To make them salable, the scripts had been recast by Hollywood hack writers. The results invariably were effronteries to Green. He was ashamed to be credited with writing them.

From Hollywood he returned to Chapel Hill and, except for a stint with the Group Theatre and a second happier stint in Hollywood, has lived there ever since. Julian Meade explains why, after having traveled so extensively, Green returned to his native North Carolina.

> He is one of those writers who is most vividly impressed by early environment and adolescent memories. Although his characters are imaginary, the negroes and country folk whom he knew as a boy are not unlike the people of his stories and plays. He finds a vital inspiration in old associations and is glad that time and fortune have brought little estrangement between him and the farmers with whom he has toiled at cotton-picking and harvesting--labours that rewarded him with physical strength and enabled him better to understand those who are, he says, "the men whom God and enlightenment have forgot."[3]

DRAMATIC WORK

Before his European trip, Paul Green had written only folk plays; then he began experimenting with form and with ways of integrating music into drama. The result of his experimentation was a new dramatic form which he called "symphonic" drama. Louisiana Cavalier, the subject of this paper, is his latest symphonic drama. His development as a playwright, the

[3]Julian Meade, "Paul Green," Bookman, vol. 74, January 1932, p. 504.

subject of this part of the paper, falls into three phases: folk play, transition and experimentation, and symphonic drama.

In his first year of college, before WWI, Green's English teacher suggested that he write and submit a play to the school-wide playwriting contest. He did and won the first prize, which was the production of his play, Surrender to the Enemy. The production was so agonizing for him that he vowed never to write another play.

After the war, "Proff" Koch convinced him to begin writing plays again. Nine years later Green had written twenty-one one-act folk dramas of North Carolina. In 1927 Green's first full-length play, In Abraham's Bosom, was presented on Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize despite much critical debate over the play's alleged patronizing attitude toward the black man. The Field God, produced on Broadway in 1928, seemed to one critic worthy of two Pulitzer Prizes for it seemed twice as powerful and important as In Abraham's Bosom. The Field God introduced themes which would permeate his later work: the power of the church in a small community, the power of gossip, and the distrust between tenants and owners. In eleven years Paul Green had written twenty-three folk plays, had won the Pulitzer Prize, and had emerged as the most promising new American playwright.

After Green's trip to Europe, he began to experiment with form, his goal being to present the heart and soul of his folk characters rather than just their tales. He realized that

singing and dancing, pantomime, and group actions were so much a part of these folk people that by removing these qualities, one removed the basic integrity of their characters, whether they were individual or group characters. He therefore tried to form these essential qualities of their nature into essential elements of the play. The goal was to create a form which could not survive without the special elements, elements of character which could not be communicated simply by words and actions. His form was to be distinguished from masque and pageant; for, in Green's vision, the elements would serve as intensifications of the characters and of the story line, and not as an end in themselves, as is true in masque and pageant. In practically every play he wrote from 1928 to 1936 he experimented with some new element or tried to refine some older one.

In an interview on June 7, 1977,[4] Green revealed that he was never satisfied with any of his plays, that they appeared "pretty bastardly" to him. He felt that one of his major experiments, Hymn to the Rising Sun, a one-act play making great use of a group protagonist, was his most artistically successful and his most personally satisfying product. Other major experiments came in the form of Tread the Green Grass (1931), which he described as "a folk fantasy with music and

[4]Interview between Paul Green and this author on June 7, 1977, held at the Speech Building at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

dumb show,"[5] and Shroud My Body Down (1935), described by the playwright as "a folk dream to be produced by living actors trained in the manner of marionettes and with masks when so specified."[6] The influence of Granowski and of Green's European sojourn can be seen in these descriptions. His most famous plays, Connelly's House (1931), produced by the Group Theatre, and the musical Johnny Johnson (1937), composed by Kurt Weill, were written during these years of experimentation.

In 1935 the difficulties of producing symphonic drama became apparent with the production of Green's first avowed symphonic drama, Roll, Sweet Chariot. This was the great Negro drama of which Granowski had spoken. Green was happy with the production for it seemed to capture the essence of the spirit and soul of the black man, but the play folded after only a week on Broadway. Green was convinced that the play was good, but it appeared too big for the Broadway theatre. A new and larger home had to be found for the production if it was to work.

In late 1935 the Roanoke Historical Society of Roanoke Island, North Carolina, commissioned Green to write an historical pageant for the hundredth anniversary of the lost colony of Croatia. He submitted an outdoor historical drama rather than a pageant, which he titled The Lost Colony. The play was

[5]Paul Green, The House of Connelly and other Plays (New York: Samuel French, 1931), 225.

[6]Quoted by Adams, Agatha Boyd, Paul Green of Chapel Hill (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), 68.

financially successful and has subsequently played successfully for almost every summer since its 1937 opening. Green was convinced that The Lost Colony (conceived as a larger production than Roll, Sweet Chariot) was successful because the Roanoke Historical Society had built a theatre for the drama. This gave The Lost Colony a home, an asset which Roll, Sweet Chariot lacked. With the construction of the outdoor amphitheatre, the unusual character of the symphonic drama was established.

Many years after The Lost Colony opened, Paul Green, writing in his third book of theatrical essays, Plough and Furrow (1968), described what he did to create the unusual character of symphonic drama.

> I try to use all the arts of the theatre working together in these plays--music, pantomime, dancing, folk songs and hymns when needed, dream sequences, masks, amplifications, mental speeches, sound track and stereophonic effects, agile lighting, mechanical production devices even--whatever is needed to push the story on to its complete fulfillment. The amphitheatre itself is a charmed and witchcraft place, and the action of the play, though centered mainly directly in front of the audience on a big center stage, can rise, erupt and state itself in an arc of some 180 degrees, reaching out armlike into left and right side stages and up onto platforms--wherever the story action needs to find its status and its home. And I use the characters in the dramas much as a conductor, say, uses various instruments in an orchestra, each coming in saying his say, reaching his point of fulfillment, and retiring into the corpus of the piece, with the exception, of course, that there is always a central character or characters.[7]

[7]Paul Green, "Dialogue by the Lakeside," Plough and Furrow, New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1968, p. 32.

His statement amply describes the theatre form which Green has been developing since 1937 and which is employed in Louisiana Cavalier.

The Lost Colony was a first for many reasons. It was the first American play conceived as an outdoor drama, as opposed to an outdoor pageant. It was the first time in recent American history that a community was involved at every level in producing a drama based on local history. It was the first annual presentation of an historical subject on the stage. The list of firsts could be extended, but the most important was that The Lost Colony was the first example of a movement which Green calls "theatre of the people."[8] "Theatre of the people" is drama which tells in rudimentary and concise terms the history of an area to visitors of that area. The plays are easy to understand and display Green's eternal optimism in the American character. Green feels that great civilization depends on great theatre; great theatre is that which to quote Green, "explores man's ethical dilemma." It is theatre where people can come and be revitalized. Green emphasized this in Natchitoches Times, April 23, 1972.

> The theatre witnesses the struggle of human beings . . .of grown-up people who won't give up. . .These are people who won't look at their navel and cry in times of crises. . .and don't need drugs to get a hallelujah feeling. . .In the plays I write I am writing about responsibility. . .about people who accept responsibility.[9]

[8]S. Smith, "American Onstage," Newsweek, 80 (Aug. 29, 1972), 82.

[9]"Outdoor Drama Depicted as Homeland of Nation," Natchitoches Times, April 23, 1972, p. 1.

Newsweek calls Green's theatre, "theatre for the unsophisticated." Green is proud of his appeal to the unsophisticated, to "people who wander into this place not knowing what to expect and have a moving emotional experience."[10] Moving and revitalizing people is Green's objective; he has spent some forty years trying to achieve it. His authorship of fifteen symphonic outdoor dramas, eight of which are still performed every summer, testifies to his zeal. His bicentennial venture, Louisiana Cavalier, first produced in 1976, which he and his aide, Rhoda Wynn, feel is his best outdoor symphonic drama, illustrates this desire.

[10]Newsweek, p. 87

Part II: The Script

At noon of Friday, June 11, 1976, one week before the opening of Louisiana Cavalier, Paul Green addressed the company: "This play has a message, I believe. It is better to swap goods than tomahawks." Green's stated anti-war intent is unmistakably clear in the play, his most recent symphonic drama.

Information on St. Denis, the Louisiana cavalier, was scant at best; he is just a footnote in some Louisiana history books. But Green found interesting details about St. Denis in the travel notes of St. Denis' chronicler, André Penicault.[11] Green discovered in these notes that the cavalier lived in the early eighteenth century and earnestly sought to secure needed goods for his people, the French, by negotiating trade agreements with the neighboring Spanish. To that end, St. Denis traveled from Natchitoches, a French colony in Louisiana territory, to Coahuila, a Spanish colony in what is now Texas, to bring trust through trade. Green also read how St. Denis fell instantly in love with Emanuela Ramon, who was engaged to Don Gaspardo Anya, the governor of Coahuila; how the governor sent St. Denis to jail in Mexico City as a spy; and how the Viceroy pardoned him. And finally Green read about St. Denis'

[11] Penicault, André, Fleur de Lys and Calumet: the Penicault narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana, trans. R. G. McWilliams, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953, pp. 144-57.

debt to the Franciscan friar Francisco Hidalgo. The concept of a Frenchman attempting to establish political trust with a Spaniard while simultaneously wooing that Spaniard's fiance seemed silly to Green at the time of his first reading. But upon reflection, he realized the dramatic possibilities in the situation and in the character of St. Denis. So Green began in earnest to write the drama.

The play Green fashioned from Penicault's notes deals with a cultural clash between mutually skeptical political communities. Green attempted to define the differences between each culture--French, Spanish, and Indians--so that the reasons for mutual suspicion would be obvious. The action of Louisiana Cavalier traces the journeys of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis as he attempts to establish peaceful coexistance through trade between these suspicious parties. In St. Denis' quest for peace Green saw a parallel to Kissinger's quest for détente in the twentieth century and, as such, Green felt the cavalier's story was important.[12]

The character of the peacemaker, St. Denis, was made heroic by Green. The cavalier read and spoke Spanish, French, and Indian dialects fluently and therefore could be persuasive in his dealing with the Louisiana council, Spanish and French nobles, and irate Indian chieftans. He was a good soldier who wanted to stop the causes of wars. He was glamorous, martyr-like, and a perpetual idealist. Having all these qualities,

[12]Interview.

St. Denis was typical of the romanticized hero in Green's other symphonic dramas: Jefferson in The Common Glory, Washington in Faith of the Fathers, John Rolfe in The Founders, and Robert E. Lee in The Confederacy. St. Denis was written as an exemplar, to be listened to, emulated, and admired.

The plot of the play is straight forward. Responding to a plea for help from Father Hidalgo, a friar in Spanish territory, St. Denis convinces the Governor and Council of the Louisiana Territory to grant him a visa to seek out and aid Hidalgo. With the aid of an Indian Priest who was hurt in a skirmish with the Apache Indians and treated by St. Denis' doctor, St. Denis leads the French party to the Spanish colony in Coahuila. The party arrives in the middle of a fiesta celebrating the engagement of Manuela to Governor Anya. Manuela's eyes meet St. Denis' eyes and they know they are in love. Governor Anya becomes jealous and suspicious of the intentions of the French intruders; but being a gentleman, he allows the French to stay in Coahuila as guests and to trade with the Spanish, while he departs on official business. Upon returning, the Governor accuses the cavalier of espionage, arrests him and his doctor, and sends them to Mexico City to await trial before the Viceroy. Hidalgo, who has secretly received word of St. Denis' arrest, appears at the Viceroy's chambers during St. Denis' trial and validates the cavalier's claim that he was on a mission of mercy for Father Hidalgo's suffering parish. The Viceroy then instructs Governor Anya

to issue a visa for St. Denis' safe passage and permission to begin French-Spanish trade negotiations which would ideally benefit both sides. All seems well until the Natchez Indians, distraught at the French thoughtless cruelty to their tribe, attack Fort Natchitoches and are annihilated by the combined French and Spanish forces. The death of the chief, Little Star, a personal friend of St. Denis, causes the cavalier to despair over the breach of trust between the native Americans and the colonists. But as he brought trust between French and Spanish, so he brings trust between the colonists and the remaining Indians. The final scene is a celebration in which Governor Anya of the Spanish, Governor Bienville of the French, and Chief Blanc of the Natchitoches Indians all smoke the peace pipe and vow mutual peace. From mutual distrust and fear, St. Denis has brought mutual trust and peaceful coexistance.

Since the play deals with cultural clashes, Green had to establish characteristics of the opposing cultures. This gave the playwright license to create three distinct groups--the Spanish, French, and Indians. Within those groups, Green created individual characters who revealed the diversity within each described group. In this way, every character on the stage had both a group and an individual characterization.

The French as a group are a despairing lot. They are totally dependent on supplies from France, supplies which never seem to come. Their King appears to have forgotten them. In St. Denis' long speech in Act I, delivered by the Cavalier in

Natchitoches to the "spirit" of the King Louis XIV, St. Denis expresses his despair in the King's neglect.

> The dedicated Iberville, our first Governor, brought your likeness here ever to remind us of the obedience we owed to you. He is dead. The great LaSalle is dead. Hundreds and hundreds are dead. Enough of death has been here. . .You do not care for us. . .only if we add to your power, to your glittering pomp and riches. And even at this moment in the great city around you the poor and hungry cry for bread.[13]

In Coahuila, St. Denis reveals to Manuela the pain he feels watching the plight of his fellow French settlers.

> If you could see the sick and hungry faces of my Louisiana colonists, hear the moans of our little children--those that are still alive--hear them at night as they shake with chills and fever on the damp cabin floors--or month after month follow the uncoffined body of one of your comrades. . .to the grave.[14]

St. Denis' desire to relieve the suffering of his fellow Frenchmen by lessening their dependence on supplies from France encourages him to attempt to negotiate trade agreements with the Spanish.

The difficult problems faced by the French cause them to argue constantly. The seemingly hopeless position of the working class with little food, long working hours, and little joy cause tensions and flaring tempers which erupt into arguments (Act I, sc. ii). This argumentative nature of the French

[13]Paul Green, Louisiana Cavalier, A Symphonic Drama Based on the Life and Times of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. Rehearsal script, 1976, p. 15.

[14]Ibid., p. 57.

is also prevalent in the Council, which consists of the elite of the French colonists (Act I, sc. iii). While these disputes are heated, they never permanently break up friendships. The arguments are merely a release from tensions, one device the hard-pressed French have found to escape reality.

Within the group Green created various types. There is the loud-mouthed Adam Bejous; the "doubting Thomas" Emile Ponti; the bawdy Bertha Guizot; the fat, haughty Ficelle Odebez; the amorous Julie Diderot; the old, bow-legged Paw Paw Dupuy; the benevolent Governor Sieur de Bienville; the clownish Medar Jalot; the affable Robert Talon; and the sadistic Lieutenant Blondel. The interaction of these characters gives the script moments of humor. The despair of pioneering life contrasts with the humor of the contrasting characters of the French individuals.

While the French are despairing, the Spanish are dancing. As a group, Green portrays the Spanish as fun-loving, lively, deeply rooted in religion, and totally subservient to their leaders. The Spanish group seems constantly to be in a fiesta mood: in every scene in which they appear, there is dancing and singing.

It is ironic that these happy people are living within a militaristic society and follow the demands of their leaders without question. Governor Anya's word is law; he makes decisions and no one objects for long. The best example of his power over the people can be seen in the final scene of Act I when the Spanish colonists, who have taken a liking to St. Denis

and the French, are told by Anya that the cavalier is a spy.

ST. DENIS
And I ask why this action--and we here in friendship?

ANYA
Friendship no more. (to the people) This man has mapped the trails, the rivers and gulches, the hills and forests from Louisiana to our Rio Grande.

ST. DENIS
And why not, sir--to serve better the coming and going of your people and. . .of mine as we trade with one another?

ANYA
The coming and not the going is what you intend--the coming of your military forces to attack us.

VOICES
Caramba! It cannot be! Then they are our enemies after all.

ANYA
(to Ramon)
Senior commandante, you will store all these goods in your warehouses, and hold them.

RAMON
(saluting and gulping)
Si, Exelencia,

ANYA
We will wait for the Viceroy's judgement. And so, Captain Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, you and your companion, who claims to be a doctor--

JALOT
I am a doctor!

ANYA
--are under arrest. I'll take your sword.

VOICES
Who could have thought this! There must be some mistake. No, no, it is true. The Governor knows. He knows.[15]

This final line is typical of the power of consent Anya holds over the people he rules.

Since there was no separation of church and state in Spain

[15]Ibid., p. 78

in the early eighteenth century, the Spanish colonists in Mexico were subjected to laws of the state, upheld by the Roman Catholic Church. The moral crisis this situation placed on the spirit of the individual Spanish colonist is illustrated by the plight of Manuela. Her parents had negotiated a political marriage between herself and Governor Anya. She had announced in the church her promise of marriage to Anya, a man she had never seen and did not love. When she meets St. Denis, she falls instantly in love with him but she cannot revoke her promise to Anya without feelings of guilt. This crisis forces her to choose between the passions of her heart and her promises solemnized in church. The situation is aggrevated by constant reminders of her obligation to the Church, first from her duenna ("a promise of the church is a promise of the soul"[16]), then from her intended, Anya ("You cannot break the promise to the Holy Catholic church--or you would damn your immortal soul."[17]) She is deeply religious, so these proddings by her duenna and her intended distress her more. Her priest, Father Paul, urges her to pray for an answer.

> Verily the deep turmoil of your spirit is proof of the greatness of your soul and the worth of it to God. Let your pleadings beat upon the gates of heaven until with their truth they open unto you. Unceasing prayer, till like Sister Teresa, your knees are worn to bleeding.[18]

[16]Ibid., p. 63.

[17]Ibid., p. 87.

[18]Ibid., p. 127.

Apparently her prayers are answered, for when St. Denis returns to Coahuila from jail in Mexico City, they are married.

Because of the political and religious regimentation, the Spanish act more as a group than as individuals. The only glimpse the audience receives of the individual lives of the Spanish colonists comes in the few family scenes between Manuela, her father, and her duenna. These scenes seem saturated with the family's acknowledgement of their obligations to the Church and to the Governor.

One element the Spanish and French have in common is their Catholicism, but their piety is colored by national characteristics. Green chose to personify Spanish and French Catholicism through the characters of Friar Paul, a Spaniard, and Friar Basil, a Frenchman. Each friar is seen only twice, but twice is enough to impress the audience with their distinct power and influence over the people they lead. In his two scenes on stage, Friar Paul stops a fiesta with a solemn chant and begins a processional to the church for vespers; and then later, he is harsh and demanding of Manuela. Inflexible and authoritarian describes the character of Friar Paul and the Church he serves. The Spanish, regimented by rigidly-enforced doctrines, accept political domination--personified by Green through the character of the autocratic Anya.

Father Basil on the other hand seems jolly, playful, and sympathetic to the passions and needs of his French flock. He is seen presenting the whorish casket girls to the settlers and then marrying them. Marrying the good God-fearing men of

his congregation to whores would probably seem heretical to Father Paul and his church, but for Father Basil it is a necessity. So he marries the settlers in an official manner. Joviality, good cheer, and an understanding that religion is only one part of the life of the French settlers is personified in Father Basil. The restrictions put on the French by their clergy are never as strict as those put on the Spanish colonists. Therefore, the Frenchmen have greater liberty of thought and more opportunities to disagree and to argue.

The songs, all of which are sung by either the Spanish or the French or together, were official, joyous, or religious. The Frenchmen sing "The Louisiana Song," a march, and the "Wedding Song," a hymn, both of an official nature. The Spanish sing the "Fiesta Song" and the "Trading Song," both joyous songs. Both groups also sing five authentic liturgical chants in Latin. The music therefore establishes a contrast between the French and the Spanish camps and gives the two cultures a common point of reference through the chants.

The Natchitoches Indians share a common religious base with the colonists, since they were converted by LaSalle. They appear predominately in scripted or pantomimed vignettes which Green calls "eye-blink" scenes. In these scenes, the Natchitoches are seen killing a deer in an interpretative ballet and presenting this deer to St. Denis; building a warehouse for the French goods; and constructing a road, the El Camino Real, for travel between the French and Spanish colonies. These scenes reveal the establishment of an ideal relationship of

trust between the French and the Indians. The trust St. Denis had established between these two parties gave him hopes for building the same kind of relationship between the French, the Spanish, and the other Indian tribes.

The Apaches and the Natchez tribes are characterized as war-like. In the Apaches' only scene, they attack the St. Denis party somewhere between Louisiana and Mexican territory. The Apaches serve only to give the play spectacle; the Natchez are meant to do a great deal more. The Natchez tribe is seen mainly through the character of its Chief, Little Star. Little Star's pugnacious character is consistent with the bellicose nature of the tribe. In the middle of the second act, Little Star reveals his grudge against the French settlers, the basis for his rage. "My enemy--you come into my land. I say no! And with your guns killing my wild game--food for my women and children. . .La Salle's men killed my father."[19] The thoughtlessness of the colonists has made Little Star bitter toward his French neighbors, but he holds a shaky friendship with St. Denis who has demonstrated his sympathy for the tribe by trading with it. Even though St. Denis has nothing to do with the annihilation of the Natchez and, in fact, does everything he can to stop the combined Spanish and French forces from attacking the Natchez tribe, Little Star, upon seeing his people dead, attacks St. Denis as responsible for the genocide.

[19]Ibid., p. 94.

ST. DENIS
Let no one harm him! He was once our friend.

LITTLE STAR
(Mockingly) Friend. . .friend.

ST. DENIS
Yes. (LITTLE STAR shakes his head slowly. He comes farther into the scene. ST. DENIS moves toward him)

LITTLE STAR
You kill my people--(He gestures off)--the dark earth drinks their blood.

ST. DENIS
Let the hatchet of war be buried between us, I beg you. . .we can be friends again.

LITTLE STAR
My people are no more. The sunlight is gone, no singing is heard now, and the moon weeps in blood. (With a yell and quick as lightning he springs on ST. DENIS)[20]

Where the Spanish and French will listen to reason, Little Star will not--his heart is too heavy. Immediately after he springs on the cavalier, someone in the apprehensive crowd fires a shot and the Chief dies.

With the death of Little Star, the last of the war-like Indians in the area are gone; and efforts toward mutual peace and acceptance between the Spanish and French can proceed. But the accomplishment had cost the life of everyone in an entire Indian tribe as well as the cavalier's once personal friend, Chief Little Star.

Green makes great use of variety in Louisiana Cavalier. The play is structured by alternating scenes of groups with intimate scenes. He uses this technique of alternation within

[20]Ibid., p. 138-9.

both the French and Spanish camps. So there are French group and private scenes and Spanish group and private scenes. Green breaks up long scenes with his "eye-blink" scenes. In some places, the "eye-blink" scenes serve as an ironic counterpoint to the main action. A good example of this is in Act II, sc. ii., when the solemnity of the wedding scene is interrupted by an "eye-blink" scene of the ravings of Chief Little Star. After the vignette is completed, the wedding goes on as if it never had stopped. Besides these structural elements of variety, Green offers an interpretative ballet, two battle scenes, dancing and singing, and several changes in locale.

The plot of the drama begins and concludes with two scenes proclaiming peace. The final peace scene as stated above is a celebration of peace between the heads of state, the successful culmination of St. Denis' efforts. The strength of the final scene encouraged the artistic director, Mr. Robert Buseick, to design an opening scene which would begin the play on the same hopeful note. The overture consisted of alternating Spanish and French national songs, eventually played in counterpoint. Mr. Buseick used this overture to fashion a cape dance, in which the Spanish, dressed in red capes, and the French, in blue capes, came together and danced with each other. When executed, the overture, no longer merely music, became an exciting display of colors and a visualization of harmonious movement in a mingling of two nationalities.

Prerecorded music and voices were used extensively. A tape of all the music for the production, composed by Isaac

Van Grove and performed by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, provided most of the musical accompaniment. The taped symphonic music was supplemented by Spanish guitars, played by cast members on stage, and tom-tom drums, played by crew members off stage. The guitars and tom-toms helped to establish the flavor of both the Spanish fiestas and the Indian war parties and work teams. Two proclamations were recorded on tape: Bienville granting the visa for St. Denis to trade with the Spanish, and Anya announcing the Spanish acceptance of St. Denis as negotiator of trade between the two cultures. The two proclamations, one issued by the French and one by the Spanish, were the successful results of St. Denis' political diplomacy. These two proclamations were so critical in the plot that Green specified they be broadcast from loudspeakers rather than spoken by a single actor on stage.

The playwright also specified other spectacular elements in the script. At least two hundred period costumes, two horses, a mule, and period rifles and revolvers were called for. A fire had to be lit in the woods behind the amphitheatre to illustrate the burning of Jalot's sweetheart, Bertha Guizot. Although Green described the fiesta dance, the trading dance, the calumet dance, the couples' dance, and the finale, he left the designing and interpreting of these dances up to the discretion of the choreographer.

The script, like all of Green's symphonic drama, reads like a dull history. It is the unscripted elements--the pantomime, music, and scenic effects--that give Louisiana Cavalier

its vitality. The successful reception of Louisiana Cavalier, drawing audiences from every walk of life, seems to illustrate the universal appeal of outdoor drama. This "symphonic drama" was finally successful, but only after many years of long work. The next part of this paper tells of the six years spent in setting up a producing organization and in preparing the Louisiana Cavalier for performance.

Part III: The First Season

The production history of Louisiana Cavalier began in 1969. In that year Mrs. Edwin Blum of New Orleans, President of the Louisiana Commission for Music and the Performing Arts (LCMPA), visited Palo Duro Canyon in West Texas for a presentation of Paul Green's symphonic drama, Texas. She left the performance wondering why Louisiana had no outdoor drama of its own. She quickly contacted Paul Green and the Institute of Outdoor Drama in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; sent them books on early Louisiana history; and expressed her desire for Green to write an outdoor drama about Louisiana, to be staged somewhere in her state. After an initial period of hesitation prompted by doubt in the dramatic worth of the material, Green decided that the story of the cavalier St. Denis had significant ideas to communicate. So he accepted the LCMPA commission to research and write a symphonic drama about St. Denis.

The groundwork for production was done by LCMPA, which requested the Institute of Outdoor Drama to conduct a feasibility study to determine the most economically practical area for the establishment of the drama. The Institute settled on a site in Northwest Louisiana, Grand Ecore, which was once a flourishing port town on the Cane River. This site, donated for the development of an outdoor amphitheatre, is only six miles west of Natchitoches, a town of 17,600, founded by St. Denis in the

early 1700's and, thus, the oldest town in the entire Louisiana Purchase. Natchitoches was an ideal choice, for besides its intrinsic historic value, the town houses Northwestern Louisiana State University (NSU). The University could and did serve as a base of operations for the initial preparations and, later, its studios became rehearsal headquarters.

The Louisiana Outdoor Drama Association (LODA) was formed in 1970 to produce the drama; Dr. Paul Torgrimson, a music professor at the University, served as president. Two years later, Mr. Charles Park, who had just graduated from the University with a master's degree in theatre, was appointed Executive Director of the project, and charged with the responsibility of collecting funds, supervising the building of the amphitheatre, and setting up the organization of the production. In 1976, seven years after Green had been convinced to write the drama, the amphitheatre was in the last stages of construction; the working scripts had been completed; and the company had been selected. Mrs. Blum's dream was about to become a reality.

PREPARATIONS

Normally state residents make up the majority of the companies producing Green's outdoor dramas; Louisiana Cavalier was no exception. The directors of the company were selected from many applicants on the basis of merit and reputation for excellence in outdoor drama and/or Louisiana theatre.

Robert Buseick.....Shreveport.....Artistic Director
Dr. William Hunt.....Natchitoches.....Musical Director
Robert Hardison.....Nashville, Tenn...Technical Director

Ginger Folmer.....Shreveport.....Choreographer
Gordon Pearlman.....Chapel Hill, N.C..Lighting Designer
Anne Shapiro.....Alexandria.....Costume Designer
Bobbie Park.....Natchitoches.....Asst. Director
Steve Wilcoxon.....Philadelphia, Pa..Stage Manager
Sally LeVasseur.....Natchitoches.....Costumer
Michael Haworth.....Nashville, Tenn...Prop Master
Norvella Smith.....Nashville, Tenn...Sound

For the premiere season of 1976, the cast and crew were selected from open auditions in Shreveport, Natchitoches, Baton Rouge, and from the Spring 1976 Southeastern Theatre Conference Open Auditions in Memphis, Tennessee. While the majority of the cast was from Louisiana, other states were represented in the cast and crew: Pennsylvania, Kansas, Florida, Arkansas, Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Nebraska.

The first call for the full company was the organizational meeting held on May 29, 1976. Park greeted us warmly and expressed his delight that the six years of preparation were almost over; that in three short weeks--the time allotted for rehearsals--Louisiana Cavalier would be presented before an audience for the first time anywhere. Thereafter his approach was business-like; he was responsible for the operation of an amphitheatre which had cost over a quarter of a million dollars and he took this responsibility seriously. He stressed professionalism and discretion and circulated a policy statement which outlined high standards of conduct for company members and penalties for the infringement of the policy. After he introduced the company to the directors, he invited us to a weiner roast with beer and Cokes at the site while we familiarized ourselves with the surroundings and met the other company members.

The amphitheatre consisted of four parts: rain shelter, audience area, stage, and support complex. The audience, entering from the parking lot, first passed through the rain shelter which housed executive offices, box offices, a concession stand, a Louisiana crafts shop, and the light and sound booths. Beyond the shelter they moved into the audience area where 1300 molded plastic seats of various colors were set in a dished Greek theatron configuration with two aisles leading down to the stage. The stage was 100 feet long and forty feet deep. At the back of the stage a high ridge afforded opportunities for masked entrances from behind the stage; this ridge fell at a sharp decline behind the stage to a blacktopped road strong enough to support a small truck. On stage left, there was a large wall of palisades with an outpost station which signified the French area; on stage right, a large presidio was constructed to signify the area of the Spanish. Behind each of these very high structures, walls were constructed to serve as masking for crowds when entering, as housing for large stereo speakers, and as posts for stage managers and other crew members running the show. The blacktopped road led to the support complex, which housed the shop, the prop and make-up storage areas, the costume shop and laundry, the dressing rooms, and the ammunition/storage areas.

Light was provided from two fifty-foot high triangular platforms on either side of the theatron. At the top of each of these platforms there were two horizontal bars, from which hung forty or more large fresnel and leko lighting instruments. The

lighting towers provided the opportunity for the designer to create many special effects.

The preparation which had to be completed in three weeks taxed cast and crew. The cast had to learn the blocking, dances, lines, and music; the crew had to set up the special effects; the costumers had to build 250 costumes; and the public relations staff had to tape radio and television spots. Three horses, a mule, and a dozen authentic weapons had to be procured; shoes and makeup had to be ordered; and hundreds of props had to be built. Practically all the props were built from the lumber in trees behind the amphitheatre; since historical authenticity was the goal, all props were made out of the same material and in the same fashion that they were made in St. Denis' time. Four large set pieces, each weighing in excess of a ton, had to be built and integrated into the set. And most important of all, the stage had to be completed. Because of record rainfall, the schedule for building the stage had been delayed beyond the critical point. The rain, in fact, almost brought the production to a close before it opened.

REHEARSALS

The first day of rehearsals proved to the company that the three week rehearsal period would be as distressing as it would be encouraging. At the first rehearsal the company was presented with two grave disappointments. First, Mr. Euseick, the artistic director, expressed his regret that the script did not read well; but he said he felt challenged to make it work on the

stage. Unfortunately the initial group reaction to his statement was one of disrespect for the script. The second disappointment came from Mr. Park. He told the company that since certain promised monies had not been received, the cast would receive only three-fourths of their contracted pay during the three weeks of rehearsal. He regretted this but contended that if the company was to be paid in full from the first week, Louisiana Cavalier could not open. This announcement aroused a great furor and even though those in the cast who had done outdoor dramas before pointed out that this initial cut in pay was common practice, two angered actors left the company. Mr. Park promised that company members would receive the contracted salary every week of the run and this promise was kept.

Mr. Buseick was a genial, middle-aged, college professor (Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana) who had many directorial credits including a prize-winning production of Stop the World--I want to Get Off, which represented the American College Theatre division at the International Thespian Conference in 1970. On the first day of rehearsal he revealed that his research convinced him the characters were all of a sturdy stock. He said he was looking for rough pioneer types in characterizations, in movements, and in vocalizations. Since very little character delineation was given in the script, he asked the members of the cast to use their imaginations in drawing character background studies so that each character would be full and interesting. To this end many cast members made much use of the

local library seeking information about the historic characters. Buseick employed a systematic technique and always an optimistic outlook. He blocked the scenes loosely, simply giving the cast basic movement patterns. After the patterns had been supplied, he would run the scene, make individual corrections and adjustments, and go on to the next. He roughly blocked out the play in the gymnasium letting the actors fill out the blocking with character actions. Some interpretative rehearsals were called for principal actors; but overall, actors were given total freedom to interpret and develop their own roles.

The rehearsal on the first day consisted of a read-through and a hearing of the taped music for the play. The cast worked in two-to-three hour blocks, with one-hour breaks for each meal. The choreographer was on hand to put the cast through physical warm-ups. From the beginning the cast was told that the heat was on: lines and blocking of the entire play had to be down by the end of the first week; dances had to be learned in one week; the songs had to be learned in three days; and all the costumes and props had to be completed for performance within two weeks, one week before the first performance.

The music rehearsals were comprehensive and pressing. Dr. Hunt, the musical director, explained the vowel changes between French, Spanish, and Latin languages so that the songs would sound authentic when sung by members of the various culture groups. The songs were drilled over and over, and during rehearsals of the chants the cast walked around the music studio practicing the correct stage movement for religious processionals.

Since everyone was expected to know all the music by the end of the first week, the vocal scores were collected on Friday, June 4, five days into rehearsals.

Problems plagued the company once it moved to the amphitheatre. Some problems arose naturally from the environment. The heat was merciless, so hats and summer clothes were indispensible. The roughness of the blocking, the struggle to remember lines and music, and the procedure of integrating the music and dance into the larger scenes caused very long, slow rehearsals. The boredom that the cast felt in these long, seemingly unproductive rehearsals was expressed in their idle chatter. When the noise began to impede communication between the director and the actors on stage, the stage manager threatened fines for chatter. This stopped most of the talking, but made rehearsals seem even longer. On Saturday, June 5, the stage manager lost the director's attaché case which held the prompt book and notes. This was a serious matter since the prompt book contained the only copy of the complete blocking for the production. Announcements of the loss were broadcast on the local radio station but the case was never found. That night, rain forced the director to cancel the rehearsal before it was over; and on the next day, the ground was too wet for the carpenters to continue building.

During the first week of rehearsals, morning and afternoon rehearsals were held at the University. In the morning the dancers went to ballet studios and the actors to adjoining rehearsal rooms for blocking rehearsals. In the afternoon, music

rehearsals were held in the Speech-Music building while dancers still practiced in the ballet studios of the gymnasium. At night there were run-throughs of the day's work. The same schedule was roughly followed throughout the rehearsal period, except that after the middle of the first week, all night rehearsals were held at the site in order that the drama could be blocked on the stage.

By Monday, June 7, one week into rehearsals, the entire play, except for the Apache and Natchez attack scenes, had been roughed out. Since blocking the Natchez and Apache scenes required more area and more levels than provided in the rehearsal room, these scenes had to be blocked at the amphitheatre. By June 7, all the props had been built and the crew began helping the builders on the stage; the dances had been roughed out; and the first act had been blocked in the amphitheatre. Only two weeks remained before opening night.

During the second week of rehearsals, the production was shaped. Mr. Buseick began tightening the scenes and holding interpretative rehearsals for troublesome characters and scenes. The blocking for the attack scenes, written by the director, was passed out on June 8 and rehearsed the next day. On Thursday June 10 the nursery began covering the dirt stage with grass squares to resemble the grassy plains of eighteenth century Louisiana. On the same day, the main acting plane was covered with several inches of sand in prepreation for concrete which would form a solid acting plane. Since the concrete had not been poured by rehearsal time Thursday night, the cast had

to rehearse on a floor of deep sand which made walking difficult and dancing impossible. This obstacle, however, did not stop the Thursday rehearsal of Act I, our first rehearsal with props. The Act lasted one hour and fifty minutes.

The events of the weekend of June 11-13 changed the entire direction the drama was taking. On Friday, June 11, Green saw the drama for the first time, signed scripts, and talked to the company. He saw the first run-through and made notes. On Saturday, June 12, his changes were incorporated--changes which seemed minor had the effect of changing the interpretation of whole scenes. At the end of two weeks of pressing rehearsals, working under many burdens, the extent of Mr. Green's changes was distressing to both the crew and cast. But trusting in his expertise, the company made every effort to incorporate the changes. On Sunday, June 13, the company rehearsed from 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. First, new blocking of the attack scenes was incorporated. Then there was a run-through of the entire production. There were many stops; the heat was irritating; and at the end, no one was satisfied with the results. Rumors circulated about the impossibility of opening on time, but Mr. Buseick would not let the pressures get to him; he was convinced that the play would open on schedule.

Even though the makeup and shoes had not arrived, most of the costumes were completed on schedule. On Monday, June 14, the cast had its first dress rehearsal. During rehearsal Gordon Pearlman began designing the lighting plot and the crew began setting the lighting instruments. On the next morning at

6:00 a.m., WBRZ from Baton Rouge filmed several promotional segments for distribution to local television stations.

On June 16, three days before preview, the rain came. It continued off and on for the next four days. The production was to open on the 20th. Despite the rain the curtain calls were blocked--in the parking lot. Mr. Pearlman spent all night, two nights in a row, setting the instruments and codifying the light cues. By Thursday, due to lack of rehearsal time, the actors were filled with insecurity and despair. Even so, the Thursday dress rehearsal lasted until 11:00 p.m. Because of difficulties in moving the four main set pieces, each weighing in excess of a ton, volunteers were recruited from the cast to stay behind after the Thursday rehearsal and help the crew move them. The pieces were supposed to have been set on runners which would have allowed the crew to simply push these larger pieces on and off stage. But the rain had made it impossible for the concrete casings, in which the runners lay, to dry. So the four pieces could not be pushed and had to be removed from the stage. It took twenty men working together to remove the units. The movers had to wade through mud ankle-deep, watching out for exposed live wires while the lights kept going on and off as the light crew adjusted them for performance. The volunteers got home about 1:00, dead tired, and wondering if, after all the hard work, the play would ever open.

On Friday, June 18, there were two run-throughs that were very long and very dangerous. These were the first complete

dress, makeup, and technical run-throughs with lights; and they took six hours. There were many dangers. Some entrances were made from behind the stage, up the steep incline. The only trails up this incline were made of lumber slats, which after the rain were very slippery. This proved a great hazard, especially to cast members with poor eyesight. Also, there was a grid held down by exposed pins mounted to the back of the ridge. In the attack scenes some of the Indians would fall back onto the grid when they died and would get cut by the pins. The guns seemed either to misfire, or fire when not needed, or refuse to fire at all when it was essential that they do. The horses became nervous around the firearms and Anya's horse refused to let the actor playing Anya mount him. The worst problem of all, however, arose from the dangerous circumstances surrounding the processional at the beginning of the second act. The actors had to walk in almost total darkness along a narrow trail raised a number of feet from the main acting plane and carry candles which melted onto their fingers. The performers were stacked very close together so that if one slipped, he started a chain reaction. To make matters worse, the processional capes were too long. During the first run-through of the processional, everyone in it was nearly paralyzed with fear. Somehow these dangers were relieved by opening day; and as the production ran, all of the safety devices possible were instituted to make the drama smoother and safer. By the end of the June 18th rehearsal, everyone was happier, looking forward to opening night, and confident that the drama was ready to open

if it did not rain.

By noon of the preview the rain stopped and the proceedings went on as scheduled. The audience for the preview were all invited VIPs: the Governor of Louisiana, Mrs. Edwin Blum, the French and Spanish consultants, members of LODA and LCMPA, critics, and patrons from all over the state. Around 3:00 p.m., LODA hosted a banquet for the guests. Normally the play would begin at 8:00; but on preview night, since there was a program before the play, the performance began at 9:00. For the pre-play program, Mr. Park, Mrs. Blum, and others, recognized those people who had worked to establish LODA and the building of the amphitheatre. At 8:30 it began to sprinkle; everyone in the audience, on stage, and in the dressing rooms held his breath. When the rain stopped at 9:00, the drama was performed before an audience for the first time. Against many odds, Louisiana Cavalier had made it to preview night and was produced for the first time before an audience, on time. After the preview a party in honor of the company was provided by LODA at the Natchitoches Holiday Inn. LODA and LCMPA representatives and honored guests from the audience were there to offer congratulations and express delight in the play and production. It was an uplifting experience for the company.

Even though the guests at the party said that they enjoyed the drama, everyone knew that the quality of production on the preview was disappointing. Everyone contented himself with the understanding that, after all the trials, the company was fortunate just to open the drama on time. The critics best expressed

the audience's disappointment. Shelton Toney of the Winn Parish Enterprise was discouraged.

> I tried. I really tried to like Louisiana Cavalier. But above all it was boring. I don't care if Pulitzer Prize writer Paul Green wrote it. It's still a turkey.[21]

David Foil of the Alexandria Daily Town Talk was more generous.

> The production is filled with lots of dancing and much music and the opening night performance quashed rumors that weather and on-going construction had forced members off the stage and had interrupted the rehearsal schedule.[22]

The Baton Rouge Morning Advocate pointed out a major script shortcoming.

> For instance, near the close of the play the killing of the Natchez chief takes on a sudden and vast significance but there had been little in the previous action to justify this kind of impact on the characters.[23]

Belinda Hulen of the Monroe Morning World expressed the only uplifting outlook for the production while exposing major script deficiencies.

> Unfortunately the script is too literal an interpretation of history to play well. Several of the scenes seemed to have no dramatic purpose but exposition which could have been handled in some other fashion, or simply left to the audience's imagination. A more stylized interpretation of the legend would have been better suited both to the playing area and to the audience's attention span.

[21]Shelton Toney, "Notes of a Newcomer," Winn Parish Enterprise, June 23, 1976.

[22]David Foil, "Louisiana Cavalier Premiere," Alexandria Louisiana Daily Town Talk, June 20, 1976.

[23]Anne Price, "Historic Setting Scene of First Outdoor Drama," Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, June 22, 1976.

> The high points of the play, the dances in various camps, show how invigorating an experience outdoor drama can be,[24]

The comments were taken to heart and, wherever possible, corrections were made.

THE RUN

During the first month after opening night, audiences got smaller and smaller and box office receipts got leaner and leaner. Indifference infected the company and lack of funds plagued LCDA. Besides Louisiana Cavalier, Mr. Buseick had been hired to direct two other plays, one professional and one amateur, in Shreveport that summer. Consequently, after Louisiana Cavalier opened, he left to fulfill these contracts. The direction was then put in the hands of Bobbie Park, the assistant director. Mrs. Park was married to the Executive Director, Charles Park, and like her husband, held a master's degree in theatre from NSU. She was charged with the difficult task of making Mr. Buseick's production work. Since all of her actions had to be confirmed by Mr. Buseick, Mr. Green, and Mr. Park, the quality of the production deteriorated while she sought confirmation through the channels; her hands were tied. June was disastrous; on several nights more people were on stage than in the audience. The play was rained out twice and when it did play, audience apathy made the company indifferent to the whole

[24]Belinda Hulen, "Cavalier Premiere Scene of Pageantry," Monroe Morning World, June 20, 1976.

project. Boredom set in and performing became a job, a routine, a drudgery. Morale was very low and professionalism disappeared. While adapting to the production routine and dangers, the performers were susceptible to and subject to a wave of minor maladies, mishaps and illnesses. Company nurses Joellyn Cheramie and Nannette Hatten were kept constantly busy helping performers who had been hurt in one way or another on or off stage. Problem followed problem, but the production continued despite them. Because of the small box office yield, working budgets were reduced; and the closing of the show before the end of the season seemed a certainty. All the hard work seemed cursed from the start, but everyone involved felt that as long as an audience came to see the show, the show should go on.

In July conditions improved; implementation of massive publicity campaigns increased audience size; new blocking and script changes gave the production a new life. On July 4, Bicentennial Day, some of the cast in costumes hawked tickets and presented short scenes with music from the play at the Cane River Riverbank Bandstand in the heart of downtown Natchitoches. After July 4th other publicity events were planned: trips to large neighboring cities, appearances on local television talk shows, and the proclamation by the mayor of Natchitoches of "Cavalier Day." On July 13, Paul Green returned with rewrites and two days later they were incorporated into the production. Several scenes were totally reworked and one entirely new expository scene between St. Denis, Bienville, and Little Star was added early in the play to give Little Star the importance

he needed to make his death significant. Publicity was then released to announce that new blocking and lines had changed the show. This was not just advertising; everyone connected with the production felt a new life in the script, a new vitality in the play, a new excitement when performing in it--and audiences began to grow.

In August, the production quality rose to its promised heights and the morale improved. With the technical bugs now worked out of the production, the company set about shaping the artistic fabric of the production. Rather than being indifferent toward the play, the actors were now invigorated. Group improvisational exercises and vocal warm-ups were conducted for interested actors every night before performance. Several company members gave free lessons to other company members in belly dancing, flamenco, ballet, tap, voice, and piano; and five programs of workshop dramas were presented by company members for private showings to the rest of the company. In fact the only overwhelming problem was a high turn-over of actors. Nearly everyone had an understudy, which softened the effect of the turn-over; but some roles had to be recast two or three times during August and several performers had to play a battery of roles in one performance. Toward the end of August, LODA offered group rates which interested many schools in surrounding areas to send whole classes to see the play. The audience was filled practically every night and the company received a standing ovation almost every night. Needless to say morale was high and the quality of the production improved. David Foil, critic of

the Alexandria Daily Town Talk, upon seeing the play in August, echoed the belief of the company.

> Rumors indicated that under the circumstances that performance was a kind of miracle--it certainly was impressive enough to give one reason to withhold judgement until the production was in better shape.
>
> And it is--positively--growing.[25]

After all the hard work, the financial headaches, the technical dangers, the mental stress and strain, and the rain, the play had become a success. Mrs. Blum's dream of an outdoor drama for Louisiana to rival Texas was a reality. According to Green, Louisiana Cavalier is his best outdoor drama to date. If this is true, then Louisiana Cavalier may not only rival the Texas production, but indeed surpass it.

The season closed September 6. After the final performance, the cast checked in makeup, costumes, props, and firearms and picked up bonus checks from Mr. Park. Then each performer left for his respective home and the theatre again was deserted. Green had opened another outdoor drama, We the People, in Maryland in 1976, but it closed, prematurely, in August. In retrospect, it is a tribute to Mr. Park, LODA, Mr. Buseick, and a never-say-die company that Louisiana Cavalier survived its crucial first season. Speaking as a company member, I can say that the excitement of the last two weeks of the run more than made up for the despairing weeks which preceded them. It was an experience which I am sure none of the members of the company will ever forget.

[25]David Foil, "'Cavalier' Found to be Improving with Age," Alexandria Daily Town Talk, August 3, 1976, p. B-12.

Part IV: Reflections

During the first season of Louisiana Cavalier, LODA made several administrative blunders which resulted in severe financial difficulties. To avoid these mistakes during the second season, LODA made changes before the 1977 season began. Many of the artistic problems arose because the artistic director, Mr. Buseick, was away during the first month of performance directing two other plays in Shreveport. Therefore he was unavailable to make necessary adjustments in the production after it opened. So LODA's first task between seasons was to pick a new director who could stay in Natchitoches the whole season. The Association decided on Ray Schexneider, the Associate Director of the Northwestern State University theatre. Mr. Schexneider, who had been trained at the Pasadena Playhouse, had directed many successful productions at NSU.

In order to create a firmer financial base, LODA agreed on at least four major policy changes. First, the season was shortened by one week, cutting down operating expenses. Second, since the drama grossed less on Sunday than on any other day of the week, the theatre would be closed on Sunday in summer 1977 rather than Monday, the dark day in 1976. Third, the cast was cut from 100 to 60. And finally, the large salaries for some of the starring roles were cut back to the base wage for secondaries in 1976, $73.60 weekly. And the base wage for

secondaries in 1977 was lowered to between $50 and $60 a week.

During the 1976 season the entire company had to make adjustments to the outdoor nature of the drama. Rain was always threatening. Many of the costumes and props were constructed with non-water-proof materials so that they had to be rushed off stage and into the shop at the slightest sign of rain. When rain was forecast, there was always a noticeable air of apprehension among the cast before the performance. On many nights the cast would come to the theatre in the rain and wait in dressing rooms in full costumes and makeup to see if the rain would stop, for the rain determined whether the drama would be played. Actually only five performances were rained out, and audiences were given rain checks when that occurred.

Adapting to the environment proved to be a major task. Because of the heat, cool clothes and hats were essential. One girl in the cast fainted during rehearsals due to sunstroke incurred by not being properly dressed. Practically every cast member was sick with something during the rehearsals and/or run, or was hurt on the set, or hurt in handling of the props. Besides the heat, the vastness of the lot caused difficulties. Getting from one acting area to another required fleetness. Running up and down the steep audience area and the steep embankment behind the stage and moving on the multi-level stage was quite strenuous work, but by the middle of the season, even the least physically fit of us were bounding up

and down, back and forth, with little effort.

The environment also prompted re-evaluation of basic performing techniques. The vast size of stage and amphitheatre space presented many unforeseen acting problems. First in importance in acting has always been that the actor be heard and understood. To do this in outdoor drama, performers must speak in exceptionally loud voices and with an unusually slow rate of speed. One basic challenge to actors in outdoor drama is to develop full-blown characterizations while speaking slowly and projecting so that 1400 or more spectators can hear every word. Actions must be large as well; they must be distinct and defined and cut down to the simplest expression of the action. Any complexity, or subtlety, in action or speech, will obscure not only a line but the entire sense of the scene, which may easily obscure the sense of the play.

The dancers and singers faced tasks equally as difficult to handle as those faced by the actors. Since the music was on tape, and there was no vocal conductor during performances, singers had difficulties staying together. Keeping on time and on key with each other and with the recording was extremely hard since they were strung over some 4000 square feet of stage space. Singers in different areas would invariably sing in differing tempos. The problem was so bad in the processional, that the processional chant was eventually taped, so that the people in that long dangerous trek across the stage did not have to sing at all. Hearing the tiny guitars and the sound

tape over the echoing voices became a major problem. The dancers, having rehearsed in a small enclosed dancing studio, were expected to fill the entire stage. As some of the dances used only a few people, these few dancers had to enlarge each movement so that it filled the entire area of the stage. And some of the dances were hazardous; at least one was performed on knees, on hard wood platforms.

As well as producing the show, the company had to promote it. Some promotion was handled through radio recording and television filmings on location. But the publicity method most often employed was hawking. Many times we were asked or ordered to don costumes and go to various places in town to sell tickets. We also took trips to malls in Shreveport and Alexandria and to service clubs all over northern Louisiana where we tried to interest citizens of neighboring towns and cities to attend. At various times, certain scenes were taken out of context, revamped, and presented as vignette previews to the public. The promotional channels gave the cast and crew a chance to meet the public.

Meeting the public is an outward manifestation of what seems to me to be the important result of outdoor drama: there seems to be a close and fundamental kinship between the symphonic drama of Paul Green and the Greek outdoor drama, in styles, subjects, and in the promotion of community pride aroused by the drama. The Greeks dealt with history and legends which were already known by the public and the retelling

of these aroused a great deal of civic pride. The topically historical subjects of each symphonic drama are so much a part of the history of the area in which it is presented, that there is a sense of local pride when local residents attend the performances. The feeling, as Green states, is "it is our play; it belongs to us."

Dramas of Paul Green

Underlined plays are Outdoor Dramas

1917 Surrender to the Enemy
1921 Granny Bolling
1922 White Dresses
1923 Day by Day
1923 Sam Tucker
1924 In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin
1924 End of the Row
1924 Devil's Instrument
1924 The No 'count Boy
1924 The Hot Iron
1925 The Beginning
1925 Lord's Will
1925 Unto Such Glory
1926 Lonesome Road
1927 The Man Who Died at 12:00
1927 On the Road One Day
1927 Saturday Evening
1928 In Abraham's Bosom
1928 Blue Thunder
1928 Quare Medicine
1928 In the Valley
1929 Tread the Green Grass
1929 Wide Fields
1931 The House of Connelly
1931 The Field God
1932 Laughing Pioneer
1934 Potters Field
1934 Fixins
1935 Roll Sweet Chariot
1936 Hymn to the Rising Sun
1936 Long Night
1937 The Lost Colony
1937 Johnny Johnson
1938 Alma Mater
1939 Enchanted Maze
1939 Franklin and the King
1939 The Critical Year
1941 Native Son
1941 A Start in Life
1941 The Highland Call
1947 The Common Glory
1951 The Faith of the Fathers
1954 The Declaration
1956 The Wilderness Road
1957 The Founders
1959 The Confederacy
1959 Wings For to Fly
1960 The Stephen Foster Story
1965 The Sheltering Plaid
1966 Cross and Sword
1968 Rossie
1969 Sing All a Green Willow
1970 This View from Above
1970 Texas
1972 Trumpet in the Land
1976 Louisiana Cavalier

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